

The positions of European political parties offer a clear choice to voters over what type of Europe they would like to see

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European Parliament elections have often been criticised from the perspective that they fail to engage voters. [Cristina Ares Castro-Conde](#) presents a comprehensive comparison of the positions contained within the manifestos of all of the main European political parties. She argues that when the programmes of each party are broken down, there are clear differences visible between the parties, highlighting that the elections represent a chance for voters to make a real choice over the type of Europe they would like to see.



European Parliament (EP) elections are due to be held on 22-25 May. European voters have often approached EP elections from the perspective that their vote simply represents a decision to support or oppose the European project in general, or that their choice should be about supporting or penalising the party or parties in government at the national level in their country. The objective of this post is to show the details of the programmes being offered by each of the main European political parties to help inform voting in the elections and show that beyond these broad issues, the elections give EU citizens a real choice over what type of Europe they would like to see.

To achieve this, the electoral manifestos of the parties with representation in the current European Parliament have been analysed. These parties are the [European People's Party](#) (EPP, 275 members), the [Party of European Socialists](#) (PES, 194), the [Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe](#) and [European Democratic Party](#) (ALDE and EDP, 85 members altogether), the [European Green Party](#) and [European Free Alliance](#) (EGP and EFA, 58 overall), the [Party of the European Left](#) (EL, 35 members in their political group), and the [Movement for a Europe of Liberties and Democracy](#) (MELD, 32 members).

In addition, the electoral platform published by the [European Alliance for Freedom](#) (EAF) has also been assessed. The EAF's platform is closely linked to the Front National leader Marine Le Pen, who is currently a Member of the European Parliament, but not a member of any political group. Last, as the electoral manifesto for the [Alliance of European Conservatives and Reformists](#) (AECR, 56 members) is not available, the 2014 European election manifesto of the British Conservative Party has been assessed instead, given it is the primary political force in the AECR group.

The first set of tables, shown below, illustrate the difference in political priorities contained within the manifestos of each of these parties. To structure the comparison, the parties' priorities are compared with the party which has the most representation in the current European Parliament, the European People's Party. The tables show how each of the political parties' priorities compare with those of the EPP. The top level of each table shows the priority articulated by the EPP in its manifesto on a particular issue, while the rows below show whether the other nine parties take a similar position or, where their priorities differ, the alternative position they articulate in their platform.

Table 1 (a): Priorities of European political parties on European integration issues relative to the priorities of the European People's Party

- [More integration](#)
- [State autonomy](#)
- [Respect for state traditions](#)

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"More integration in 'big' things"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	No clear position
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	Similar position
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Similar position
European Green Party (EGP)	Similar position
European Free Alliance (EFA)	Similar position
UK Conservative Party	"No to more Europe"
Party of the European Left (EL)	No clear position
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	"Rejection of single European state and bureaucratisation of Europe / Future treaty reforms must be ratified by a referendum"
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	"Opposition to 'imposed' federalisation by Brussels"

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Autonomy for member states in 'small' things"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	No clear position
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	No clear position
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Similar position
European Green Party (EGP)	Similar position
European Free Alliance (EFA)	Similar position
UK Conservative Party	"Return of powers to the UK / Referendum on EU membership"
Party of the European Left (EL)	No clear position
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	"General emphasis on national sovereignty"
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	"General emphasis on national sovereignty"

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Respect for different traditions/diversity of Member States"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	No clear position
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	No clear position
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Similar position
European Green Party (EGP)	No clear position
European Free Alliance (EFA)	Similar position
UK Conservative Party	Similar position
Party of the European Left (EL)	No clear position
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	Similar position
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	Similar position

Table 1 (b): Priorities of European political parties on economic and investment issues relative to the priorities of the European People's Party

- [Creating growth](#)
- [Reforms](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Climate change](#)

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Create the right conditions for new and sustainable growth"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position but greater emphasis</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position but greater emphasis</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>Similar position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>"Broader reform alongside budget cuts in the CAP and structural funds"</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>"A new ecological and social development model"</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>"A new budgetary consolidation different to the current views of austerity and globalisation"</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Structural reforms to attract private investment so as to generate growth and employment"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	"First and foremost priority is (decent) employment"
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	"Employment main priority (especially youth) / Emphasis on research and public investment in future-orientated sectors"
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Similar position
European Green Party (EGP)	Similar position but greater emphasis on public investment
European Free Alliance (EFA)	"Greater emphasis on social cohesion and public investment"
UK Conservative Party	"Reduction of EU budget, whose expenses should focus on growth and employment to maximise value of British taxpayers' money"
Party of the European Left (EL)	"Greater emphasis on public investment"
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	No clear position
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	"Reduction of youth unemployment at Member State (not EU) level / Dissolve the Eurozone / Safeguard all European industries, especially agriculture"

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Social market economy: Balance between the principles of freedom and solidarity"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	"Preference of social rights on economic freedom"
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	"Effective fight against protectionism, Government interference and Market regulation"
European Democratic Party (EDP)	Similar position
European Green Party (EGP)	"Greater emphasis on social justice"
European Free Alliance (EFA)	"Greater emphasis on solidarity"
UK Conservative Party	"Emphasis on the single market and business interests, especially in Financial Services / Protect the countries outside the Eurozone"
Party of the European Left (EL)	"A social Europe"
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	No clear position
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	"Strengthen position of the traditional family in Europe / More equitable tax system / Rejection of solidarity at European level and elimination of aid to countries in financial difficulties, which could return to their national currencies to devalue"

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Combat climate change through a more efficient use of energy and investment in renewables"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position but greater emphasis</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>Similar position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Similar position</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>Similar position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

Table 1 (c): Priorities of European political parties on immigration and home affairs issues relative to the priorities of the European People's Party

- [Free movement](#)
- [Border control](#)
- [Organised crime](#)
- [Data protection](#)

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Maintain freedom of movement for people in the EU"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position but also emphasises "freedom of movement of knowledge" (teachers, students, researchers) as "fifth freedom"</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Similar position provided that it doesn't mean freedom to receive "generous benefits"</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>No clear position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>Not a priority</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>Not a priority</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Control immigration at EU's external borders"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>"Greater emphasis on immigrants' lives"</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>"Greater emphasis on immigrants' lives"</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>"Greater emphasis on immigrants' lives"</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Similar position</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>No clear position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>Similar position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>"Each Member State must design and implement its own policies"</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Fight against organised crime"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>No clear position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Similar position</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>No clear position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Data protection, understanding privacy as a fundamental human right"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>No clear position</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>No clear position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

Table 1 (d): Priorities of European political parties on foreign policy/enlargement issues relative to the priorities of the European People's Party

- Foreign policy
- Enlargement
- Neighbours
- TTIP
- Co-operation

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Strengthen foreign policy"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>"Ensure that foreign and defence policies remain under British national control"</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>Similar position but emphasis on Europe as a promoter of world peace</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Prudence in future enlargements"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>No clear position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>"Support for enlargement"</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>"Right to self-determination and recognition by the EU in the process of 'internal enlargement'"</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>"Support for enlargement, but with new mechanisms to prevent mass migration"</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>No clear position</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>"Review through membership criteria in a referendum in each Member State"</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Longer term approach in relations with neighbouring countries in the East and promote prosperity in the Southern Mediterranean"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>Similar position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>Similar position</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>No clear position</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>"Mediterranean cooperation and agreements that benefit the people"</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Negotiated free transatlantic market and a reliable partnership between the EU and US"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	<i>No clear position</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Similar position, also supports free trade agreements with other major economic regions</i>
European Democratic Party (EDP)	<i>No clear position</i>
European Green Party (EGP)	<i>"Opposes deal in its current form. Lack of transparency and wants more environmental safeguards"</i>
European Free Alliance (EFA)	<i>No clear position</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Similar position, also supports trade agreements with Japan, India, ASEAN and Mexico, and investment agreement with China</i>
Party of the European Left (EL)	<i>"Opposes agreement and supports immediate suspension of negotiations"</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>No clear position</i>
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	<i>No clear position</i>

<i>European People's Party Position</i>	<i>"Review of the cooperation policy, which was based on human rights, the fight against poverty and education"</i>
Party of European Socialists (PES)	No clear position
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	No clear position
European Democratic Party (EDP)	No clear position
European Green Party (EGP)	No clear position
European Free Alliance (EFA)	No clear position
UK Conservative Party	Similar position, also supports working for the effectiveness of European efforts to combat poverty in the world's poorest countries, and to ensure the EU's contribution in response to humanitarian emergencies
Party of the European Left (EL)	No clear position
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	No clear position
European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)	No clear position

Note: The tables illustrate how the manifesto priorities of each of the European political parties compare with those of the European People's Party (EPP) on different issues in four key themes: issues related to European integration, the economy and investment, immigration and home affairs, and foreign policy/enlargement. For each issue a representative description/quote is shown to illustrate the European People's Party's priorities. Where the party has a similar position to the EPP, this is marked in the right column as "similar position". Where the party has a different priority on the issue from the EPP, a representative description/quote of the party's position is shown in the right column. Where there is no clear position on the issue that can meaningfully be compared with the EPP's position, the right column indicates "No clear position". For more information on each party see: [European People's Party \(EPP\)](#), [Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe \(ALDE\)](#), [European Democratic Party \(EDP\)](#), [European Green Party \(EGP\)](#), [European Free Alliance \(EFA\)](#), [UK Conservative Party](#), [Party of the European Left \(EL\)](#), [Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy \(MELD\)](#), [European Alliance for Freedom \(EAF\)](#).

Table 2, shown below, builds on this comparison to summarise the main political messages which are contained in each of the ten electoral manifestos.

Table 2: Main political messages of ten European political parties ahead of the 2014 European Parliament elections

<i>Party</i>	<i>Main political message</i>
European People's Party	<i>A bigger Europe on bigger things and smaller on smaller things.</i>
Party of European Socialists	<i>A Europe that progresses, a Europe that protects, and a Europe that performs.</i>
Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>The European Union needs to be stronger, simpler and more democratic.</i>
European Democratic Party	<i>A Europe that is fair, open and dynamic, admired by the world for its culture and values, respected for its political action.</i>
European Green Party	<i>Instead of the socially deaf and environmental blind austerity, we propose three coherent avenues to sustainability: fighting unemployment, poverty and all forms of social injustice, transforming our economies with innovation and eco-efficient solutions to tackle climate change and environmental degradation; re-regulating the financial industry so it serves the real economy. We call this a European Green New Deal.</i>
European Free Alliance	<i>The time has come for self-determination for a true Europe of the people.</i>
UK Conservative Party	<i>Our first priority is always the British national interest. A stronger economy at home, renewed respect abroad, real change in Europe.</i>
Party of the European Left	<i>We propose another way: that of a refoundation of Europe on a new basis. Our goal is to open up hope, a new ambition of cooperation and solidarity at a European level in the service of our people and the people of the world.</i>
Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy	<i>A transparent and democratically controlled EU that is less centralised and more flexible.</i>
European Alliance for Freedom	<i>Sovereignty, the withdrawal – or at least a deep re-examination – of the single currency and immigration issues.</i>

Note: Compiled from party manifestos.

During the crisis, which began in 2007, European citizens' confidence in the EU institutions and in the governments of the member states began to deteriorate. This has led to greater calls to strengthen democracy at the European level, with this issue forming one of the key factors in the European election campaign. Given the central importance of EU democracy to the campaign, Table 3 illustrates a number of proposals for strengthening democracy. The column in the left indicates the proposal, while the column in the right shows which parties have articulated support for the proposal in the lead up to the 2014 elections.

Table 3: Proposals for strengthening EU democracy and the European political parties which support each proposal

<i>Proposals / statements</i>	<i>Party / parties</i>
✓ Simplification of the European Citizens' Initiative	<i>EL</i>
✓ Questioning the role of interest groups	<i>EL</i>
✓ Limiting the exercise of influence by interest groups	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Organization of European public debates on major issues, with a referendum in as many countries as possible	<i>EL</i>
✓ Larger role for the European Parliament	<i>FI PES EFA</i>

✓ Larger role for the European Parliament,	<i>EL, PES, EFA, EGP, EDP, ALDE</i>
--- also in the legislative initiative	--- <i>EL, EFA, EDP</i>
--- especially in crisis management and economic policies including monetary politics	--- <i>EGP</i>
--- in controlling subsidiarity and proportionality also in the Commission annual working program	--- <i>ALDE</i>
✓ Larger role for National Parliaments	<i>EL, ALDE</i>
--- allowing them to block unwanted European legislation together, and generally granting them more control over European laws	<i>Conservatives (UK)</i>
--- imposing better control over their governments' actions in European affairs	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Gender equality as a principle recognized in the treaties	<i>EL</i>
✓ Greater presence of women in European institutions	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Application of the principle of subsidiarity	<i>PES, EGP, ALDE, EPP, EFA, MELD</i>
✓ Subnational districts for European elections in all countries	<i>EFA</i>
✓ Participation of all constituent nations of a country where there is more than one on the Commissioners proposal	<i>EFA</i>
✓ Lower the voting age to 16 for European elections	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Pan-European lists with transnational candidates	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Strengthening the anti-corruption policy	<i>EGP</i>
✓ More transparency in the Council of Ministers	<i>EGP, EDP, ALDE</i>
--- publishing all voting results	<i>EGP</i>
--- publishing national bargaining positions	<i>EFA</i>
✓ Increase in the EU Budget (for instance establishing a carbon and/or energy tax) and decrease in dependency on national contributions	<i>EGP</i>
✓ A digital bill of rights	<i>EGP</i>
✓ A new more participatory European convention to decide on the future of Europe, and have a final say through an EU-wide referendum	<i>EGP</i>
✓ Discuss with citizens before adopting decisions	<i>EDP</i>
✓ European Commission's legislative function should be exercised at the request of the Parliament and the Council	<i>EDP</i>

✓ Combine the positions of President of the Council and the Commission into one	<i>EDP</i>
✓ Greater transparency and clarification for citizens of the functions of the European Council	<i>EDP</i>
✓ Permanent restructuring/simplification of the EU administration for the sake of transparency and efficiency	<i>ALDE</i>
✓ An audit of all EU agencies and elimination of all those with no real value	<i>ALDE</i>
✓ Differentiated integration to facilitate greater integration to countries that want to	<i>ALDE</i>
✓ Only one European Parliament seat	<i>ALDE, Conservatives (UK)</i>
✓ An in-out referendum on Britain's membership of the EU by the end of 2017	<i>Conservatives (UK)</i>
✓ Greater role for national governments in establishing the European political agenda	<i>Conservatives (UK)</i>
✓ The legitimate level of democracy is the State, its regions and Parliaments	<i>MELD</i>
✓ As there isn't a single European people, stop the process of European integration	<i>MELD</i>
✓ Correction of post-Lisbon EU institutions legislative powers	<i>EFA</i>
✓ National referendum on EU issues	<i>EFA</i>

Note: The abbreviations for each party are **European People's Party (EPP)**, **Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe (ALDE)**, **European Democratic Party (EDP)**, **European Green Party (EGP)**, **European Free Alliance (EFA)**, **UK Conservative Party**, **Party of the European Left (EL)**, **Movement for a Europe of Liberties & Democracy (MELD)**, **European Alliance for Freedom (EAF)**.

Having considered all of these differences, it is clear that the European elections represent a clear choice between different platforms. Hopefully even if voters still think that their vote on 22-25 May makes no difference, it now has a little less to do with the belief that European political parties do not have different electoral programmes.



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